

The cycle of stealing money from prevention accounts to pay for suppression of forest fires just repeats itself again and again without end, and it will continue until this funding problem is finally fixed.

Senator CRAPO, our colleague from Idaho, and I have been working on a bipartisan basis to fix this flawed policy for quite some time now. He and I introduced the Wildfire Disaster Funding Act to end this damaging cycle, which I have described and which in the West we call fire borrowing. Our bill would raise the Federal disaster cap to allow the agencies to treat wildfire-fighting efforts like other natural disasters because wildfires are natural disasters, destructive and costly, no different than hurricanes, floods, and tornadoes.

When our governmental agencies are forced to borrow from other accounts to fight fires that have bankrupted these accounts for fire suppression, they rob from the funds that are needed to reduce hazardous fuels in the forests, which leads to even more choked and overstocked forests ripe for future fires.

In effect, what happens is the prevention funds—the funds for thinning, cleaning out all of that debris—get shorted. So then you might have a lightning strike or something in our part of the world and you have an inferno on your hands. The government, in effect, borrows from the prevention fund to put the fire out, and the problem just gets worse and worse. It is that problem that Senator CRAPO and I are trying to fix.

On a bipartisan basis, we seek to give the agencies the tools they need to support the courageous firefighters on the ground, men and women who put their lives at risk to ensure that Americans, their homes and communities are protected from destructive wildfires.

I know there are other Members of the Senate who are very interested in solving the fire-borrowing problem. I encourage all those Members to work with me, Senator CRAPO, and our staff to find a solution that is acceptable to Congress and can be passed soon.

This is an urgent matter. This is not something you can sort of let go and offer the amendment to the amendment to the amendment, the kind of thing that happens here, and it just gets shunted off for years on end. This is urgent business because the West has to be in a position to clear these hazardous fuels and get out in front of these increasingly dangerous and ominous fires. We have to end—we have to end this cycle of catastrophic wildfires in the West. It is long past time for action. I urge colleagues to join Senator CRAPO and I to work with us and our staff so this body moves, and moves quickly, to fix this problem.

There is an awful lot of uncertainty when it comes to calculating the Federal budget. But what we know for sure—for sure—is that this problem of wildfires in the West is getting increasingly serious. The fires are bigger, the

fires are hotter, and they last longer. It is time to budget for reducing this problem in a sensible way.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

GEORGE SCHENK, CELEBRATING 30 YEARS OF FLATBREAD

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, I wish to recognize George Schenk, founder of one of Vermont's most beloved restaurants, American Flatbread. Thirty years ago, American Flatbread was built from the ground up, driven by George's own enthusiasm, innovation, and drive. He baked his first pizza—flatbread as he prefers to call it—in a wood-fired stone oven of his own design. Today, American Flatbread still bakes its creations in the same stone ovens.

George started with a vision where his food was not just great tasting and nutritional, but also nurturing and healing the soul. He accomplished that and so much more. Anyone who has sat down at American Flatbread after a long day hiking, skiing or even just to visit understands the satisfaction of eating at George's restaurant. He and his staff maintain a commitment to the core values of the integrity of a meal, using organic and locally sourced ingredients, including those grown in a greenhouse next door. George cultivates these ingredients to deliver on his promise of "good, flavorful, nutritious food that gives both joy and health."

American Flatbread also reflects the best of Vermont's community traditions—caring for one another. Food is often given to help local hospitals and families in need, and those same citizens give back when they can. Like many Vermont towns, Waitsfield was devastated by Tropical Storm Irene, and among the damaged businesses was American Flatbread. Despite the damage, they were able to reopen in just a few short days thanks to the work of hundreds of local volunteers in both their time and in donations.

Since the fire was lit in that first stone oven, George has stayed true to his vision of a sustainable and community-oriented business, one that has flourished while calling Vermont its home. In honor of American Flatbread turning 30, I ask unanimous consent to have printed in the RECORD Sally Polak's story from the May 28, 2015, edition of the Burlington Free Press.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

[From the Burlington Free Press, May 28, 2015]

AMERICAN FLATBREAD TURNS 30, THROWS COMMUNITY PARTY

WAITSFIELD.—Thirty years ago in his side yard in Warren, George Schenk made a pizza in his wood-fired field stone oven.

The toppings were simple: olive oil, garlic, Parmesan and herbs from his garden.

"I didn't know if it was going to stick to the rock," Schenk said. "I didn't know if it was going to bake. The oven had no door."

Two couples who were hanging out drinking wine shared that pizza, or flatbread in Schenk vernacular.

Their response was like a wave at a football stadium on a smaller scale, Schenk said. Smiles moved from face to face.

"We just thought it was great," said Lyndon Virkler, dean of education at New England Culinary Institute, who was one of the original flatbread eaters. "Because of the nice hot rock it had a nice, crisp crust. And real simple, pure flavors."

What was meant to be a side dish became the "highlight of the evening," Virkler said. He had met Schenk—a ski bum—five years earlier in the kitchen at Sam Rupert's, a Warren restaurant. Virkler was chef and Schenk was a salad maker with creativity and drive, Virkler said.

"We've often reflected on our place in history," Virkler said. "My wife and I being able to sample the first flatbread."

Schenk knew that night 30 years ago he had made something he and other people enjoyed eating. Beyond that, he found something that was gratifying to make: from building the oven to splitting wood and making a fire to kneading the dough.

"I was looking for a professional cooking opportunity that felt right," Schenk said. "Not necessarily being on a line behind closed doors."

Schenk's pizza—American Flatbread—has been around ever since: never behind closed doors and often outside. It started once a week at Tucker Hill Inn before Schenck opened American Flatbread at Lareau Farm in Waitsfield in 1992. That restaurant spawned a dozen American Flatbreads in New England, one in Hawaii and one in British Columbia.

American Flatbread will be available to all next Saturday, when Schenk celebrates 30 years of flatbread with free pizza and salad at his Waitsfield restaurant. Bigger than the birthday party, the event is to recognize community members who give to their communities in a variety of ways, he said.

"It's the whole range of human experience," Schenk said, listing the spheres of people and organizations he intends to honor: religious, local government, volunteer fire and ambulance personnel, people who serve seniors and the ill and injured, those who are involved in the arts and work to protect the environment.

"Here in this small valley there are 54 registered nonprofits," Schenk said.

Schenk spoke of the help his business received after two floods—in 1998 and 2011—damaged the restaurant and grounds at Lareau Farm, site of American Flatbread.

"Over 400 people helped us dig out," Schenk said. "People donated tractors, cleaned firewood, mucked out the basement and moved debris. In the absence of that help, this little business would have failed."

Money also was donated, including a \$25,000 interest-free loan.

"People get really squirrely about money," Schenk said. But this loan was without that kind of attitude. The check came with a post-it note that read: "Thinking of you." When Schenk repaid his last loan installment of \$1,000, the check was returned uncashed, he said.

"In various iterations that story repeated itself over and over," Schenk said. "With acts of profound kindness, at a time of need and loss."

The celebration next Saturday is to do something "nice," Schenk said—choosing with care a word an English teacher advised him long ago to stay away from.

WORDS WITH A SIDE OF PIZZA

Words matter to Schenk. Over the years they have achieved a place of importance in his business.

The restaurant in Waitsfield has gardens that grow food for flatbreads and salad, a campfire on the stone patio, and banners printed with Schenk's writings on food, family, community, philosophy, and social issues.

His compositions, which he calls "dedications," appear in the menus at American Flatbread. Schenk has written more than 1,400 over the past 28 years.

"I have often felt as though if I didn't write, the flatbread wasn't complete, it wasn't as good," Schenk said. "Maybe in truth, I was not as good or complete. It provided an internal discipline that I needed."

In his semi-retirement, Schenk, 62, is reading through the archive of his dedications with plans to publish them in a book.

Reading through his dedications, the ones that emerge as most meaningful to him are about his family and the time he spent raising his two children, now grown, Schenk said.

"I'm acutely aware that those days and events are past and will never come again," Schenk said. "The dedications captured something about their childhoods and my experiences that I wouldn't otherwise have."

A dedication called "The Family Bed" is on the porch at American Flatbread.

It reads in part:

"We are together. Laughing and talking, getting ready for bed. 'Read to me first,' cries Willis who is three. I look at Hanna, half grown at eight years, she looks back at me with patience. 'Pick out your books and jump into bed, I'll be with you in just a minute.' (I go downstairs and fill the old stove with big chunks of wood. It is cold for April.) I hop back up, two stairs at a time, and join them in the big bed."

Nearby is a dedication titled "Children and the Kitchen." Schenk wrote:

"Children have a natural curiosity about the goings on in a kitchen. It is important to nurture this curiosity so that they have as their own the skills and care of good cooking. Almost all food work, from the garden to washing dishes, including knife-work, is child-friendly."

DREAMING IN THE DIRT

The garden is where Schenk prefers to spend time these days. He has a plot in the staff garden at Flatbread, and he works in a greenhouse at Lareau Farm.

Schenk loves the physical activity of gardening, and being outside in sunlight and fresh air. He has a particular interest in the nutrient content of the soil, and values the way garden work helps produce food that is "nutrient dense" and rich in flavor, Schenk said.

"There's a kind of psychological peace and health that comes with the work," he said. "Our palates really can guide us to health affirming food."

He has built in his garden a structure he calls a "soil invertebrate condominium."

Soil invertebrates, insects and worms, stimulate soil bacteria, which improve the biology and chemistry of the soil. The creatures also aerate the soil, and help with pest control, Schenk said. They allow Schenk to play in the dirt, and peek into that "magic place" where they live.

"I've come to take an enormous amount of happiness from this work, and peace," Schenk said last week in his garden. "As I become older, that peace and well being has become something that I value greatly. My goal wasn't to go out and create a pizza empire. It was to have a healthy and happy life."

He sold his restaurant development group a few years ago, and now works as a Flatbread consultant. Thursday, he trucked buckets of clay gathered at Lareau Farm and sapling alders from a swamp in Roxbury to Rockport, Maine, to build an oven for a new American Flatbread restaurant.

"It was about letting go of my ego," Schenk said of his selling the development group. "When we idealize the American corporate dream and growth, that's what we see and hold up as a model of success."

"I got caught up in someone else's dream. As I grew, I came to realize that it wasn't my dream."

Schenk dreams in the dirt these days, a place he hopes is teeming with activity.

"Systems that are more complex tend to be more stable," he said. "It's stability that we're looking for in our lives."

TRIBUTE TO LAURA PECHAITIS

Mr. BROWN. Mr. President, I rise today to honor the career of Laura Pechaitis, a dedicated public servant who has made a profound difference in the lives of thousands of Ohioans. For 13 years, I have been honored to have Laura on my staff, where she has helped veterans dealing with problems large and small. Laura retires on May 8, 2015, after more than 30 years of service to her community.

From the moment Laura contacted my then-congressional office about a job, I should have recognized that I was encountering a woman of uncharacteristic zeal and dedication. Laura wrote to me after she—along with her husband, Theodore, and two sons, Marc and Scott—had moved back home to Ohio from New York. She had worked for 18 years in the New York Assembly for State Representative Michael Bragman as his director of constituent services. During her time in the New York Assembly she helped develop a program used by all assembly offices to track and manage casework. Hiring her should have been an obvious decision, but it was only after she had written to me three times that I finally recognized the dedication and passion of the person I was dealing with. Hiring Laura has made a difference in the lives of thousands of Ohioans.

On my staff, Laura primarily focused her efforts on assisting Ohio's veterans. Our veterans and servicemembers dedicate their lives to our Nation, and Laura worked to make sure that they received the respect, gratitude, and assistance befitting their service. Inspired by her father—a World War II naval veteran—Laura has been committed all of her adult life to serving those who served us. As a student at Miami University, she helped form an auxiliary for the Navy ROTC program, serving as its commander.

She helped all generations of veterans. She helped men who stormed the

beach on D-day secure long-overdue medals they had earned, and she helped recent Iraq war veterans access VA benefits to attend college and transition to civilian life. Her ability to resolve seemingly intractable cases was legendary. For veterans who had been waiting months, she was able to expedite their cases and get them the attention they deserved, many within 24 hours. One constituent had been told by the VA that his claim would take 20 days to process. Frustrated and distraught, he called Laura while driving to the VA clinic. By the time he pulled into the VA clinic, Laura had resolved the issue. Another veteran in Columbus had lived in her house for 27 months, but she was too afraid to unpack out of fear of being evicted. Laura helped ensure that this veteran had the VA benefits that would enable her to stay in her home.

Going above and beyond the call of duty was the norm for Laura. One veteran even had a term for her dedication, dubbing such exemplary service the "typical Pechaitis fashion." Another constituent from Warren was having his TRICARE bills denied by the VA. Not only did Laura have the issue resolved within 24 hours, but she worked to help him reenroll in college and went so far as to put him in touch with a mentor at a local university to make sure he went back to school.

Her drive for public service, however, went beyond veterans. In fact, long before he became the star of the Cleveland Cavaliers, a young LeBron James used to come into my Akron office to spend time with a friend whose mother worked for me. During one of those visits, Laura helped LeBron James register for the draft—the Selective Service draft that is, not the NBA draft.

Since 2006, Laura helped coordinate more than 10,000 cases for veterans and Active-Duty members of the armed services. She brought the same energy and empathy to each one. Laura has been a champion of veterans in Ohio, and the breadth of her impact is remarkable. She has been a model public servant, and I am proud to have worked with her.

Our actions in Congress are closely watched, but what too often goes unnoticed is the work of dedicated staff members whose only goal is to serve those we are elected to represent. I ask that my colleagues join me in thanking Laura Pechaitis for her service to our Nation.

VOTE EXPLANATION

Mr. MENENDEZ. Mr. President, I was unavoidably detained for rollcall vote No. 196 on cloture on the motion to proceed to H.R. 2048. Had I been present, I would have voted yea.